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EDITORIAL

What precisely is the work of a parish priest? We have raised this question persistently in *Canada and Christendom* because we believe that at the moment it receives no clear answer in the Canadian Church. And not only is the layman frequently puzzled by this problem; the parish priest himself is not always certain what his job is supposed to be. Is it his primary business to be the policeman of manners and morals in the community? Some priests seem to adhere quite firmly to this point of view, helping to create the widespread notion that religion is a matter of pious respectability. This has the unfortunate result of strangling what genuine religious life there is within the Christian Church, and driving away all those who are not classed amongst the respectable. Nevertheless, it seems to be the view most widely held amongst the laity, and is particularly popular in middle class parishes where the people are often encouraged to believe that their way of life is in some peculiar sense sanctified. A sociologist might describe this kind of Christianity as the 'religious aspect of bourgeois culture.'

Or is it the function of the priest to be a kind of all-purposes social worker, keeping the children off the streets and creating nice clubs for the young people? If this is the case, we suggest that less time be spent in theological studies so that our ministers might be allowed to take more courses in sociology and psychology. In fact, why not close down our theological colleges, and train our men in schools of social work? An extra course or two might be offered on the 'ethics of Jesus' to add a kind of moral flavoring to the approach of these community engineers.

But perhaps we have missed the point. Perhaps the real job of the Anglican parson is to remind Anglicans of their priceless heritage of British culture. Perhaps the British way of life mingled with the grand old Anglican tradition constitutes the gospel of the Church of England.

This is by no means an exhaustive survey of current theories about the role of the Anglican Church, but these are all ideas which we have heard advanced on numerous occasions (perhaps not in the exact form that we have presented them, but substantially the same, we feel). They are widespread enough, and sufficiently deep-rooted to be cause for profound concern, and unless the 'axe is laid to their roots,' the Anglican Church will have failed wretchedly to perform its real work. And if the Anglican Church alienates itself from its real purpose, from its founder

and its foundation, its days on this earth will be numbered.

What then does constitute the work of a parish priest? In actual fact, he has a desperately urgent mission. He must proclaim with clarity and conviction God's salvation for men through Christ and his Church. He cannot do this only by sermons, though every sermon must declare the power and love of God, and call for repentance in the face of that power and love. Nor can he do it simply by regulating the outward features of worship (though it can hardly be done where there is irreverence, carelessness, and irrelevance in worship). Nor can he do it by multiplying the number of parish organizations — the kingdom of God incorporated! — though organizations do not *have* to be a stumbling block. How is God's healing love for men communicated except through a community of those who really believe; a community of those who have responded to God's revelation in Christ and his Church; a community of those in whom the love of God itself actually dwells?

How can such a real Christian community be created within the parish as it now exists? This is the important question which faces our church to day, and every other problem, every other concern must be subordinated to it. The editors of *Canada and Christendom* intend to make a consideration of this problem their principle 'project' in future issues. In the fall they will meet with four experienced parish priests to consider 'the meaning of a Christian community within the parish' and to study some of the obstacles hindering its development. We will therefore have more to say about this matter in October, but in the meantime we invite our readers to present their own views on this subject.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

"The one final and utter failure of the Church would be its ceasing to be able to bring to sinners assurance of forgiveness, if its ministers were unable to say with conviction that communicates itself from priest to penitent: 'By his authority committed unto me, I absolve thee from all thy sins. Go in peace, the Lord hath put away all thy sins.' "

Dr. Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*.

This statement would astonish most of the people in my congre-

gation. A few know that it is true, because they have in fact had their sins forgiven; but the majority, corrupted by a pervasive form of irreligion which they call "protestantism" (pace Luther!), would write it off as Catholic, and ipso facto false. As far as one can see, very few people in our churches know anything about the forgiveness of sins. The fact that they say a general confession every time they go to church means nothing, or if it means anything at all it is simply a support to their conviction that sin is a vague thing about which one neither thinks or talks particularly and in detail. When confronted with the fact of their sins they are pained, and express the opinion that their sins are strictly a private matter between themselves and their God, and any interference, intervention, or mediation on the part of a church or minister (the word priest, as one might expect, sticks in their gullets) is entirely unwarranted and gratuitous. When driven to despair by their sense of guilt (there is little doubt that all have plenty of this) it is to the doctor, not the priest, that they repair.

A great many people bury the memory of particular sins; and in the course of time almost forget them. When something occurs to bring them to mind they calm themselves with the comforting thought that it happened a long time ago. Time erases the smudge from their own souls, and the recollection of it from the memory of the Almighty.

It would be wrong to suppose that this loss of faith in the Church as the Body of Christ, the means whereby God reconciles men to himself, results in every case in withdrawal from the Church. In this northern town, in which the frontier characteristics still in part survive, a larger proportion of the people attend church than in Toronto. The "churchmanship" is similar to that which prevails generally in the Canadian Church, and the belief, or lack of it, in actual forgiveness of sins corresponds to the general level in other more settled parts of the country. As a rule here as elsewhere there are more women at church services than men, although there are few northern communities in which one will not find most loyal and able support for the Church from at least a few men.

When one seeks for a reason for this widespread attendance at services and support of the Church, one will not find as has already been said that the forgiveness of sins is either what is sought or found. This is a general statement to which there are notable exceptions. But it is true to say that the Church is a rallying point because people are naturally gregarious; Christian morals are regarded as a desirable standard for community life; and the Church provides a dignified and comfort-

ing setting for the critical events in life. The Church is paid little attention by the bushworkers who have slight interest in a settled community. Thousands of men are scattered through the forests in lumbering and engineering camps, yet very few find their way to church when the occasional missionary goes through, or when they get into town for a holiday. The detached or unattached man is not interested in the religion he has seen displayed in the show windows of the Church. Only "Catholics" (regardless of qualifying prefix) desire the Church, and they want it because they wish to have their sins forgiven, and the benefit of the sacraments generally. Most congregations do not even expect the bushwackers and their like to come to church. Two Sundays ago four men turned up in our church from a Hydro camp a few miles from town. We were all astonished, although some were frankly delighted to welcome them.

Teaching, we are told, is the necessary thing in dealing with our partially de-Christianized congregations; but mere verbal instruction will not command the attention of the majority; and even those who seek such instruction in the Faith as is commonly provided do so out of a somewhat academic interest. Antiquarianism is extraordinarily prevalent even on the frontier. Also in a country where over fifty percent of the population is Roman Catholic (and their religion is vital, make no mistake about that) the non-Romans are always glad to find grist for their polemical mills.

The Anglican Church has not failed "finally and utterly" because those of her priests who have a conviction about man's Fall and God's remedy are able really to forgive sins. The trouble seems to be that the Church as a whole does not go forth into the world today with the express purpose of forgiving sins. The ideal seems to be rather the provision of something described vaguely as "helpfulness," "kindness," "tolerance," and so forth. It is certain that such aimless goodwill can effect very little of value in the relations between man and God, and man and his fellows. Our approach would be quite different if we were convinced that man suffers from a fatal disease called sin for which we have the one and only absolute and certain cure. Without this conviction we merely propagate a noble philosophy akin to Stoicism which is ultimately quite useless.

A doctor knows about physical and mental ailments and is skilled in the art of healing them; therefore people go to doctors. It is not necessary for doctors to urge people to come to them, nor do they need

to talk all the time about illnesses and their remedies. Likewise, when the clergy know that sin is a fact, and that God does away sin through them, people will come to them and use their ministry. Mere talk about sin is not enough; and indeed the priest need not talk much about it at all if he really believes that sin is the universal disease afflicting mankind, and that he is actually empowered to abolish it in all who come to him penitently. Such a conviction will temper his entire ministry. What is required is not a campaign, or a technique, but an attitude born of conviction and personal experience in which the priest can approach his people with the good news of forgiveness.

It is significant that the radical, revivalist sects, whose practices always involve "confession" and "washing", are growing rapidly in the scattered communities in this area of Northern Ontario. It is only the older, non-Roman bodies which seem to be static, or even losing ground. The Anglican Church, with her liturgical tradition and the relatively "religious" atmosphere it commonly generates, makes demands on her people in terms of belief and practice which alienate many who, because of this loss of conviction about forgiveness, fail to see the rhyme or reason of it all. One is more likely to be successful in gathering in the respectable multitude if one runs not a church but a social club at which prayers are said, and where there is much talk about morals by the leader. Too many of the people in our congregations are firmly convinced that "good citizens" can be made by proper teaching and good environment. What they do not know is that from the Christian standpoint the distinction between good people and bad people is false. The problem is not to be stated in terms of "good" and "bad" at all; it is that the "best" are hopelessly imperfect. Only when this is seen to be the real problem will a Divine remedy be sought and found. To reveal this truth is primarily the job of the clergy, and at the moment it is the job which most urgently needs to be done. If we fail to preach this gospel of forgiveness now and are content to be a stabilizing force in settled areas, our operations will soon be confined to the great cities, which are the graveyards of the human race.

H. V. R. Short

NOTES ON THE BURIAL OFFICE

Canadians generally do not have the knack for decent burials. The pitifully gauche state funeral of the late prime minister was evidence enough of this fact. On the other hand, the example of the funeral of George VI should spur us on to restore some dignity to the funerals of those who come under our pastoral care. There is much to be done. Instead of crying for the moon, let me set out a few suggestions which are within the realms of possibility. If they seem **unexciting** and disconnected it may be put down to cautious bidding — there are some face cards which will be played later.

(1) People will have their devotional needs met — no matter what those in authority decree. It is obvious that All Saints' Day has been transformed into All Souls' Day; and not only in the mind of the laity, if the typical sermon for All Saints' Day is any indication of what the clergy feel and have not merely cribbed. Deny people a legitimate means of communion with their dead and intercession for them, it is but monstrous to berate them for seances and table-rappings. They will have their All Souls' Day, even if they must transfer it to All Saints' Day to the confusion of theology. The Calendar must come to our rescue and provide us with the two days devotion needs.

(2) The duty of intercessory prayer is often overlooked as no statistical returns are required by Diocesan authorities in this priestly work. The departed should have their share in the intercessions of the priest. The parish should provide a well bound book, in diary form, to record the date of death of each parishioner. At the anniversary of the death the priest may bid prayers and include those whose anniversary it is in his eucharistic intention. As few parishes have a daily celebration it may be necessary to commemorate the departed of one week at the Sunday eucharist. Cards can be sent to the families concerned announcing when the commemoration will take place. If it is not possible to carry out such a programme, the priest should bear in mind that the daily office can be offered with intention for the departed. This ministry is one which should be shared by the whole congregation. May the day be soon behind us when people will think it their agonizing duty to drop from their prayers those whom they love and have prayed for every day of their lives.

(3) Prayers should be said in the presence of the body each day before the funeral. The *Priest's Vade Mecum* provides suitable offices

for these visits. It is important to use words familiar to the bereaved, e.g. the Apostles' Creed said together as an act of faith. The use of the departed person's name should be introduced into the prayers — for the family he is "thy servant *Edward*". The daily visit should be timed for the latter part of the evening. At the end of whatever short office the priest uses he can be of great help in despatching those who would otherwise linger until the crack of dawn.

(4) No doubt a doctor's thesis could be written on the anomaly of the disappearance of the pall in this self-consciously democratic age. Its disappearance aids and abets the flower-decked "conspicuous consumption" coffin. The funeral pall gives dignity to what is otherwise pitiful, ugly and common. Its ample folds charitably cover the barest boards or the most pagan "bronze casket", never giving a hint of what lies beneath. It need not be sombre. The pall for the funeral of Sir John A. Macdonald was magnificently worked in gold thread. It covered the coffin during the funeral in the Church of St. Alban the Martyr, Ottawa, and accompanied the body to Kingston right to the cemetery. Some zealous Liberal must have made off with it for the pall disappeared.

The parish priest should invite the ladies to provide the parish with this necessary piece of equipment. Colour should be used daringly—red, gold, blue and silver are appropriate. The pall should be ample enough to fall in full folds to the floor when the coffin is placed on the wheeled trolley so dear to the undertaker's heart. It should not be so fussy or fine that snow or rain would ruin it.

The priest should leave the pall at the home or funeral parlour on one of his visits before the procession to the Church, for the coffin should be covered from the time it leaves the home until it is being made ready to be placed in the grave. It is popular today to meet the coffin inside the church. This is a breach of the rubrics. The prayer-book compromise has relieved the clergy of the duty of conducting the body from the home; it still directs that the body be met outside the church, "at the entrance of the Church-yard". The writer's experience at Roman funerals has been that the pall is placed on the coffin when it rests at the communion rails and is whisked off after the Absolution. This practice allows the hand polished mahogany, the hand cast bronze handles, etc., to be displayed to all as the outward and visible sign of the family's devotion and the undertaker's sales ability. Those men simply have to be watched.

(5) With great restraint and the most careful phrasing the parish

priest might introduce a short address at the funeral service. There are many in attendance on such occasions who could not otherwise be reached, and the Christian understanding of death and the last things may find a response in them. If the best that the priest can manage is a shifty dodging of the issue by a saccharine "Now, I like to think...", he had better let St. Paul do the speaking for him.

The ministry to the dying, the bereaved, and the departed should not depend on the capricious will of the priest. He should be clear in his own mind about his duties. He must let his people know what he is prepared to do and commend his practices by teaching beforehand. It is a subtle form of clerical cruelty to upset people with strange and new-fangled practices when all that is most familiar seems to be dissolving around them.

Brian Freeland

REFLECTIONS ON 'A PRIEST WORKMAN IN ENGLAND'

Priest Workman in England, published last year by the S.P.C.K., is the report of an (anonymous) English priest who spent several years working in English factories during, and after the war. The book is important for at least two reasons. In the first place, it comes to grip in fact and in detail with the problem of being a Christian and an industrial worker at the same time. And secondly, it offers a great many practical suggestions for the reformation of parish life in the Anglican Church.

The author puts forward no easy formulas for the conversion of the working class. He does not feel that all problems are solved when the church explains that the industrial worker should "offer his work up to God". The fearful monotony of so much factory work is experienced and reflected upon by the author, who realizes that it is impossible to offer up to God an uncreative, tedious, and virtually meaningless job, unless a very high level of spiritual development has been reached. And since the religion of the working man is essentially a kind of practical moralism — "to do a good turn if you can, and never do anyone any harm" — and since he believes in God "much in the same way as he believes that

there is a north pole;" it is hopeless to talk to him as if it could be assumed that he had already a firm Christian belief. In fact, the philosophy of the working class is grounded in a 'common sense' materialism. There is no real belief in sin, no real conviction that a human being is more than an animal capable of tending a machine, and no hope in life for much more than the occasional escape from colorless routine, into obvious forms of excitement. In relation to this kind of philosophy, Christianity is simply irrelevant. It has nothing to say that the working man can easily understand.

The philosophy of the industrial working class in Canada is much the same as it is in England. On the whole, this class has been lost to the non-Roman churches, and this is a severe judgement upon them. Many historical reasons could be adduced to explain this situation, but at the moment we are not concerned to discuss them. The point is, that if we are going to take the Gospel concerning Christ to these people, we must literally *take it to them*. Industrial chaplains may be a step in the right direction, but an industrial chaplain might have difficulty in breaking down the natural barrier which exists between himself as a representative of the Church, and the factory worker. Moreover, if he were to enter a plant under the auspices of management, he would at once jeopardize his position with the workers. The English priest workman (and also the priest workmen in France), have found that to share the actual life and surroundings of factory workers, and to make friends with those encountered in the course of every day life, is liable to produce more intensive results, even if the actual numbers are small to begin with. There is no reason why this could not be done in Canada. It is one problem which offers no financial difficulties. It only requires men to offer themselves for the work, perhaps just for a limited number of years, after which, they might engage in full time parish duty, ministering to those with whom they had previously worked.

The author's ideas for the reform of parish life deserve a great deal more space than we can devote to them here. In some respects the parish situation in England is different from that in Canada. We do not on the whole have serious problems of small attendances (certainly not in middle class areas); nor do we encounter peculiar problems that arise from being an 'established' church. But essentially, the problem is the same: how to foster real Christian parish life, in a culture where Christianity is hopelessly confused with non-Christian, secular ideas and practices.

As far as worship is concerned, the author favours a single Eucharist each Sunday, to be attended by the whole parish (extra services would of

course be required in churches where the congregations are too large). He is critical of the 8.00 o'clock 'early communion' attended by only a handful of people, because of its incongruity with the idea of a 'corporate' act of worship. Also, he argues that a non-communicating High Mass is both a corruption of the meaning of the Eucharist, and also is remote from the life of the people, and can hardly in any sense at all be called an 'act of the people.' He has a number of other interesting suggestions to make in connection with music, vestments, and the offertory, suggestions which can be found in the last chapter of his book.

Among the other problems he discusses, are Baptism and Confirmation. He regards the principle of indiscriminate Baptism (practised almost universally), as a prostitution of the sacrament. He offers several ideas of his own — some of which are controversial, to say the least — but all of which insist on the principle that the context of Baptism must be genuine Christian Faith. The idea of having Mohammedan godparents is one to which he takes strong exception. In connection with Confirmation, he feels that more "shameful scandals", more "swindles", and more "open neglect" can be cited than of any other feature of church life. He has much to say about the matter of age (he prefers thirteen to fourteen, or seventeen to nineteen), and insists that classes should last for at least six months. He has a good deal to say about the value (almost the necessity) of the Sacrament of Penance, and the need for programs of spiritual direction. And finally, he has some interesting comments on the value of cell groups, and parish meetings. Many of these are points which are worth a full article in themselves. In the meantime, we would suggest that the book is worth reading. The author may at times appear to be excessively scrupulous, but he is without question a man of considerable courage, thorough honesty, and a good deal of insight.

M. C.

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